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Pattern of conferences

Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The conference facilities at Nairobi, created 15 years ago to serve the governing bodies of the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, assumed a new role with the establishment of the United Nations Office at Nairobi in 1996 and are now recognized as a fully-fledged conference centre. That role was reconfirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/248 B on the pattern of conferences, in which the Assembly adopted a practical approach to solving the perennial problem of the underutilization of conference facilities at Nairobi by creating a permanent interpretation service. At its fifty-fourth session, the Assembly made a number of policy decisions to strengthen the role of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, *inter alia*, as a centre of meeting activities. The present report contains the first results of those policy decisions for Nairobi as a venue for United Nations conferences and meetings.

* A/55/50.
** The present report provides updated statistical information.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 54/248 B, the General Assembly expressed concern that the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi were still underutilized; reiterated its call for their better utilization; and urged all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Commission on Human Settlements and encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to increase their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In paragraphs 14 to 17 of the same resolution, it further reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving the situation, and requested him to report to it at its fifty-fifth session on actions taken to that end. The present report is submitted in pursuance of that request.

2. As a proactive measure to facilitate greater utilization of the Nairobi conference facilities, the Assembly decided in paragraph 24 of resolution 54/248 B to establish a permanent interpretation service within the United Nations Office at Nairobi no later than January 2001. The present report provides statistics that confirm the projections submitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in August 1999 (A/54/221), with an emphasis on the latter part of 1999, for which only forecasts were available at the time of submission of the 1999 report. It also provides statistics on the first half of 2000 and projections for the latter part of 2000, and projects the effect of the creation of a permanent interpretation service as a factor in attracting more meeting activity to the Office from 2001 onwards.

II. Meeting activity at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in 1999 and 2000

A. Meetings of United Nations bodies with headquarters at Nairobi

3. As already indicated in the 1999 report (A/54/221), only two United Nations bodies have Nairobi as their headquarters: the Commission on Human Settlements and the Governing Council of UNEP.

4. The Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) held its first session in Nairobi from 8 to 12 May 2000, with 25 meetings in six languages.

5. The Governing Council of UNEP held its sixth session (the Global Ministerial Environment Forum) in Malmö, Sweden, from 29 to 31 May 2000 at the invitation of the Government of Sweden, and with the approval of the Committee on Conferences. The session held 13 meetings in six languages.

6. The Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and their subcommittees continued to hold their regular and special sessions, as well as their regional group meetings, in English. The total number of those meetings held within the last 12 months was 21 for UNEP and 15 for Habitat. Those bodies are looking forward to holding meetings with interpretation as of 2001.

B. Other United Nations meetings

7. The 1999 report (see A/54/221, para. 10) projected meeting activity at Nairobi of some 300 meetings of intergovernmental and expert groups for the whole of 1999, 200 of which enjoyed interpretation. The information below confirms those projections by providing details on the sustained meeting activity at Nairobi between August and December 1999.

8. Other United Nations meetings held or planned at the United Nations Office at Nairobi between August 1999 and December 1999 are listed in annex I. The total number of United Nations meetings held at Nairobi from August to December 1999 was 111.

9. The total number of meetings with interpretation actually held at Nairobi in 1999 was 254, of which 32 were meetings of calendar bodies, while the remaining 222 were meetings of intergovernmental and expert groups related both to the United Nations and other organizations. The number of events held without interpretation was much higher — 354. Over the last three years, the number of meetings with interpretation has fluctuated s follows:

Year	*Number of meetings with interpretation*
1997	166
1998	140
1999	254

10. Meetings held from January to July 2000 are listed in annex II; the total number of United Nations meetings held at Nairobi over that period was 52. If the trend of the year 2000 continues, then the number of meetings with interpretation should be not less than 320 — a utilization rate of 21 per cent.

C. Meetings at other locations

11. As already stated in the 1999 report (A/54/221), there is no underutilization of meetings-servicing capacity, that is, of staff resources at Nairobi, which are commensurate with actual workloads, as demonstrated by statistics on meetings serviced at other locations (see annex III).

12. Meetings which United Nations Office at Nairobi Conference Services plans to service during the latter part of 2000 are listed in annex IV.

III. Meeting activity at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in 2001

13. In 2001, the two Nairobi-based calendar bodies are scheduled to hold their regular sessions in Nairobi. The twenty-first session of the Governing Council of UNEP is planned for 5 to 9 February 2001, and the Commission on Human Settlements will hold its eighteenth session from 12 to 16 February 2001. The second session of the Commission on Human Settlements acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) is also scheduled to be held in Nairobi, from 19 to 23 February 2001.

14. The United Nations Office at Nairobi has been requested to host the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects (19-30 March 2001). Some 1,000 participants are expected at that meeting. In mid-to-late June 2001, United Nations Headquarters plans to hold the International Conference on Financing for Development in Nairobi.

15. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will hold its seventeenth session in Nairobi from 4 to 6 April 2001, while ACC has also shown interest in a meeting during the second week of April 2001.

16. As far as meetings of the UNEP-coordinated convention secretariats are concerned for 2001, the Convention on Biological Diversity plans three meetings in six languages, the Ozone Secretariat two meetings in six languages, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal three meetings in English only, UNEP Chemicals one meeting in six languages and the UNEP Regional Office for Africa five meetings in two languages.

IV. New developments

17. The decision to create a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi will have a dramatic impact on meeting activities at Nairobi. United Nations Office at Nairobi Conference Services has circulated to all client offices information on the expected availability of interpretation as of 2001. The above bookings of meetings for 2001 do not reflect the full magnitude of demand that will be generated by the arrival of interpreters in the Gigiri compound. There are strong indications that such interests exist not only from among the United Nations agencies based in Nairobi but also from non-United Nations entities.

18. Through concerted efforts on the part of Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the creation of such an interpretation service is well under way. During the visit of management from the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to Nairobi and consultations, *inter alia*, on this issue with the Director-General of the Office, arrangements have been made for the new service to become operational in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/248 B.

19. The Secretary-General has approved a proposal by the Director-General to separate the Office's Conference Services from its Division of Administration, and to convert it into the Division of Conference Services at Nairobi. The new structure is being put in place to accommodate the new

interpretation service and to make it fully functional within the next few months. It will manage the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and will continue to be fully accountable for their efficient utilization.

20. In the first part of 2000, the United Nations Office at Nairobi hosted a series of major environmental events, including the eleventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The events put to the test the ability of the Office to handle conferences not previously held at Nairobi, and to cope with unprecedented massive participation by non-governmental organizations, press and governmental delegations and observers. Using their own resourcefulness, the United Nations Office at Nairobi and UNEP increased the seating capacity of the combined three conference rooms for plenary meetings from 1,200 to 1,939 seats, and the seating capacity of one room for the Committee of the Whole from 500 to 758. To handle the total number of participants and observers (2,000), press (250) and representatives of over 100 non-governmental organizations, the United Nations Office at Nairobi allocated an extra 35 offices and meeting rooms to accommodate governmental and non-governmental delegations. It also cooperated with the regional offices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) and Habitat to accommodate the additional meeting room requirements, with interpretation. Through cooperative arrangements, the ICRAF conference complex adjacent to the compound was allocated to non-governmental organizations.

21. The UNEP library was temporarily closed and its two floors were converted into a business centre, press room and press briefing room. Business centre activities (computer access, e-mail, fax, mobile telephones, LCD projectors, photocopying, courier service etc.) were outsourced to a major commercial company on a competitive selection basis. By bringing to the grounds of the United Nations Office at Nairobi three additional caterers, the catering capacity was increased to 2,000 persons at one sitting. All this was done at no cost to the Organization but through voluntary efforts by all staff members in the Gigiri compound. To make it possible to use the compound as a regular venue for major meetings, the project presented earlier for modernizing the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi should be reviewed in the light of the successful experience of the events of April-May 2000.

22. The initiative of holding an expert group meeting at Nairobi in December 1999, as reported in paragraph 18 of General Assembly resolution 54/248 B, is a good sign of a proactive attitude on the part of United Nations bodies. As the meeting was a success, further events of this kind at Nairobi should be encouraged.

V. Conclusions

23. The effect of the creation of an interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi from 1 January 2001 can be evaluated as the potential interpreter utilization rate against (a) meetings held at Nairobi in 2000 with interpretation; (b) meetings held outside Nairobi with interpretation; and (c) Committee of Permanent Representatives meetings held in Nairobi over a 12-month period in English, which in future will be held with six-language interpretation. The figure is 300.

24. The creation of a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi offers great potential for Nairobi as a venue for United Nations conference and meetings. In this respect, the close cooperation between the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in implementing the decision is commendable. Further reporting on the impact of the creation of the interpretation service will be carried out as part of future reports on the utilization rate of conference facilities at Nairobi.

Annex I

United Nations meetings held at Nairobi from August to December 1999

Organization	*Title of meeting*	*Language(s)/duration*
UNEP/ROA	AMCEN expert consultation on biosafety	E/F – 23-24 August, 4 meetings
UNDP/UNIFEM	High-level seminar on Africa's external debt	E/F – 30-31 August, 4 meetings
UNEP/DEIAEW	EIS training and education in sub-Saharan Africa	E/F – 6-8 September, 6 meetings
	EIS best practices in sub-Saharan Africa	E/F – 9-11 September, 6 meetings
UNEP/DEPI	Network of African environmental lawyers meeting	E/F – 13-15 September, 6 meetings
UNICEF	Inaugural meeting of the African Evaluation Association	E/F – 13-17 September, 10 meetings
UNEP/ROA	African NGOs and UNEP partnership action meeting	E/F – 20-22 September, 6 meetings
UNEP/ROA	African regional preparatory conference of COP-3	E/F – 27 September-1 October, 10 meetings
UNEP/DEDPL	Global workshop on vulnerability index and adaptation	E/F/S – 1-9 October, 18 meetings
UNEP/DEDPL	Workshop on the review of the handbook on implementation of biodiversity and related conventions	E/F – 11-14 October, 8 meetings
Habitat	International Conference on Urban Poverty	E/F – 12-14 October, 6 meetings
UNEP/ROA	Workshop on freshwater resources in sub-Saharan Africa	E/F – 26-30 October, 10 meetings
UNDP/UNOPS	Nile river basin cooperative framework project: POE meeting	11-13 November, 6 meetings
UN/DESA	Fifth expert group meeting on financial issues of Agenda 21	E/F – 1-4 December, 8 meetings
Habitat	Ad Hoc group meeting on creating and strengthening linkages between the formal and informal sectors in Africa	E/F – 8-10 December, 6 meetings
Habitat	Asia-Africa expert group meeting on the informal sector	E/F – 8-10 December, 6 meetings
UN/DESA	Round table on sustainable production and consumption	E/F – 14-16 December, 7 meetings

Note: The total number of United Nations meetings held at Nairobi from August to December 1999 was 111.

Annex II

Meetings held from January to July 2000

Organization	*Title of meeting*	*Language(s)/duration*
UNEP/ROA	African ministerial conference on the environment and forests	E/F – 24-27 January, 8 meetings
UNEP/ROA	African regional consultations on the world energy assessment	E/F – 25 and 26 January, 4 meetings
UNEP/DEIAEW	GEO training in eastern Africa	E/F – 13-17 March, 10 meetings
UNEP/DEPI	Thematic workshop on the abatement of greenhouse gas emissions	E/F – 27 and 28 March, 4 meetings
UNEP/Climate Change	Global solar and wind assessment: Africa regional meeting	E/F – 29 and 30 March, 4 meetings
UNEP/ROA	African regional meeting on disaster prevention, preparedness and response	E/F – 3-7 April, 10 meetings
CITES	African elephant range States	E/F – 6 and 7 April, 4 meetings
CITES	Eleventh Conference of the Parties to CITES	E/F/S – 10-20 April, 25 meetings
UNEP/CBD	Advanced preparatory meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity	E/F – 11 and 12 May, 4 meetings
UNEP/CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity and IUCN meeting on sharing the benefits from biodiversity: session of the Global Biodiversity Forum	E/F – 12-14 May, 6 meetings
UNEP/CBD	Bureaux of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice	E – 14 May, 2 meetings
UNEP/CBD	Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity	A/C/E/F/R/S – 15-26 May, 42 meetings
UNEP/DEIAEW	GEO-3 start-up meeting: Africa region	E/F – 31 May-2 June, 6 meetings
UNEP/GEF	Assessing national needs of persistent toxic substances: national experts meeting	E/F – 31 July-3 August, 8 meetings

Note: The total number of United Nations meetings held at Nairobi from January to July 2000 was 52.

Annex III

Meetings serviced at locations outside Nairobi, January to July 2000

Organization	*Title of meeting*	*Language(s)/duration*
UNEP/CBD	Informal consultations on the Biosafety Protocol	A/C/E/F/R/S – 20 January-4 February
	First extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to adopt the Cartagena Protocol	
	Fifth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice	
UNEP/CHEMICALS	First meeting of the Interim Chemical Review Committee under the Rotterdam Convention, Geneva	E – 21-25 February 2000
UNEP/CHEMICALS	Fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on persistent organic pollutants, Bonn	A/C/E/F/R/S – 20-25 March 2000
UNEP/ROA	Meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, Abuja	E/F – 4-7 April
UNEP/CBD	Meeting on article 8J of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Seville	A/C/E/F/R/S – 27-31 March 2000
UNEP/MLF	Thirty-first session of the Executive Committee of the Multilateral Fund, Geneva	A/C/E/F/R/S – 3-7 July 2000
UNEP/OZONE	First meeting of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, Geneva	A/C/E/F/R/S – 10-13 July 2000
	Meeting of the Implementation Committee under the Non-compliance Procedure of the Montreal Protocol, Geneva	
	Meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Montreal Protocol, Geneva	

Note: The total number of meetings held under this category for January to July 2000 was 10, eight of which were provided with interpretation.

Annex IV

Meetings which the United Nations Office at Nairobi Conference Service plans to service during the second half of 2000

Organization	*Title of meeting*	*Language(s)/duration*
UNEP/CHEMICALS	Seventh meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for an international legally binding instrument for the application of the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, Geneva	A/C/E/F/R/S, 30 October-3 November
UNEP/CHEMICALS	Fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for an international legally binding instrument for implementing international action on certain persistent organic pollutants	A/C/E/F/R/S, 4-9 December
UNEP/MLF	Thirty-second session of the Executive Committee of the Multilateral Fund, Ouagadougou	A/C/E/F/R/S, 4-8 December
UNEP/OZONE	Twelfth meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, Ouagadougou	A/C/E/F/R/S, 4-15 December
UNEP/CBD	First meeting of ICCP under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montpellier, France	A/C/E/F/R/S, 11-15 December

Note: The total number of meetings planned for August to December 2000 is 11, all of them requiring interpretation.